



**A**labama's forests offer their owners a multitude of recreational opportunities. Hunting, fishing, hiking, and similar activities provide countless hours of enjoyment. Another source of recreation, sometimes overlooked, is photography. The woodlands of Alabama have a great diversity and abundance of life that give the photographer ample chances for capturing great images. You will never have to worry about running out of things to photograph. In fact, you might ask, "Where do I start?"

A good place to begin your photography exploits is with the land itself. Take landscape photos of some of your favorite spots: a scenic overlook, a wooded slope, a stream or pond, a field, and so on. Repeat these scenic shots under varying conditions and times. Clouds or fog can add interest to an otherwise average vista, and seasonal pictures of the same area lend color and variety. Often, landscape photos can be improved by including something in the foreground to frame the scene and add a sense of depth.

Next, take pictures of plants you find on your land. Trees make great year-round subjects. Take images of them through the seasons as they produce flowers, fruit, and colorful leaves. Wildflowers, always a great subject, can be found from early spring until autumn. Try shots of shrubs, vines, and grasses as well. Do not worry if you cannot name a certain plant. Take the picture and identify it later in a field guide. When you see this plant again, you just might recognize it. You will be learning and having fun at the same time.



Photo by J.W. Hybart III

# Enjoying Your Land - With a Camera

By Jim Hybart

In my experience, the most challenging camera work to be attempted in the forest is wildlife photography. To get good photos of wild game, you have to take the same precautions that hunters do, as well as considering several factors peculiar to photography. The amount and direction of the light, exposure settings, subject distance, camera support, and composition are prominent among these. Concealment plays a big part in wildlife photography. If you have game food plots with shooting houses that are used for hunting, these are excellent places to

try your luck. Ground shooting houses work best since pictures taken at the same eye level as your subject are the most appealing. Also, remember that wildlife includes other animals besides the ones you are accustomed to hunting. Pictures of non-game birds, mammals, and reptiles can be just as fascinating as one of a wild turkey.

Besides this menagerie of natural subjects, use your camera to document events that occur on your land as well. This not only includes pictures of successful hunting and fishing trips, but also

forestry-related activities. Take before, during, and after photos of logging operations. Take some shots before and after a prescribed burn. Shoot pictures of newly planted seedlings, then annual photos of the same trees to have a visual record of their growth. Such photographs may be of assistance when planning future site prep and planting work. You can also use your camera to document unfortunate occurrences such as storm damage. These pictures are helpful with insurance or casualty loss claims. As

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Photo by J.W. Hybart III

*Pictures of mammals, reptiles, and non-game birds such as this cardinal can be just as fascinating as one of a wild turkey.*

time goes by, you will create a photographic history of your forest and you will be amazed when you look back at some of your first images to see how the land and timber developed over the years.

Which brings us to the big technical question - what photographic equipment do you need? The variety and quality of cameras and accessories have never been better. All types of cameras from com-

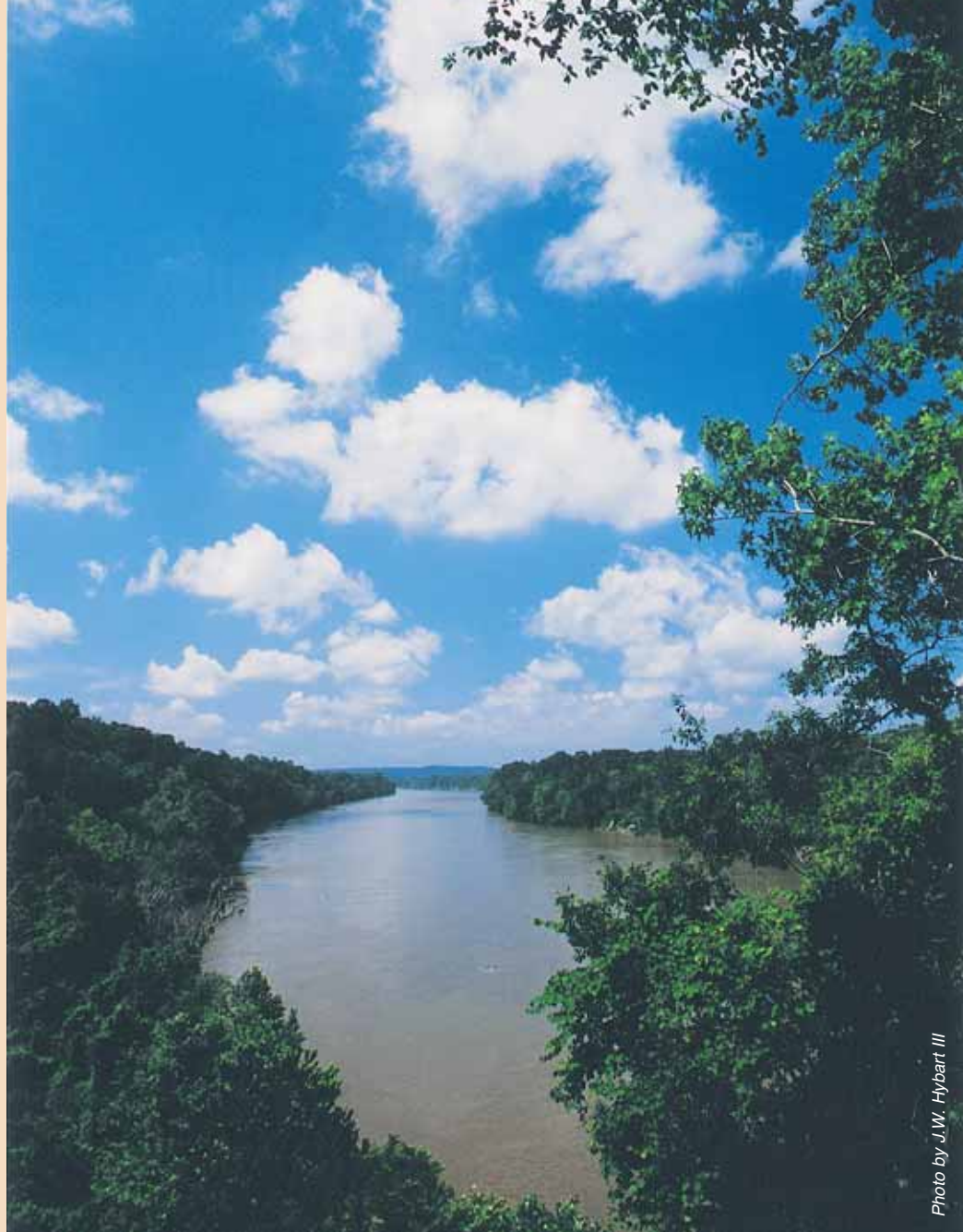


Photo by J.W. Hybart III



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*Above and left: Photos taken at different times of the year reflect the various colors of the seasons.*

pact "point and shoot" models to large format field cameras are on the market. The digital imaging revolution that occurred almost overnight has created previously unheard of possibilities for photographers. The choices can be overwhelming, but the operative word to keep in mind when considering what to buy is versatility.

While point and shoot cameras are convenient and simple to use, stepping up to the next level will improve your chances for a greater variety of first rate photographs. The most versatile system is the 35mm single lens reflex (SLR) film camera or its digital equivalent. It is

Photo by J.W. Hybart III



*(Right) Wildlife photography can be the most challenging camera work to be attempted in the forest.*

*(Bottom) Use your camera to create a photographic history of your forest. Take “before” and “after” shots to document forestry-related activities such as pine thinning.*

Photo by J.W. Hybart III

indeed a system – not just a camera. SLR cameras have a wide range of accessories making them suitable for just about any type of photography.

The most important accessory is the camera lens. There is a large assortment of lenses designed for various uses. For instance, wide-angle lenses take in a large portion of the scene and thus work well for landscape shots. Telephoto lenses narrow the field of view while magnifying the subject and are the obvious choice for wildlife photography. Zoom lenses can vary their coverage and magnification and are suitable for a variety of pictures. There are also specialized lenses. One of the best is the macro lens, which allows for interesting close-ups of wildflowers or insects.

A host of other components is available. An add-on flash unit will offer more power and options than the smaller flashes built into most cameras. Teleconverters are attachments that go between the camera body and lens to increase magnification. Extension tubes mount the same way and aid in magnifi-

cation by shortening the minimum focusing distance of a particular lens. One other item that is indispensable for serious photography is a tripod. This will hold the camera steady, especially for close-ups and telephoto work.

Should you select a film or digital camera? It is really a matter of personal preference. Both types work extremely well. If you are computer savvy, digital might be your choice as imaging software programs provide ways to enhance your images. If you prefer traditional photography, do not hesitate to go with a film camera. There are makes and models to fit every budget. Shop around and

find something with which you are comfortable. You do not have to buy the most expensive gear. Remember the old axiom, “cameras don’t take great pictures – photographers do.” Having a clear understanding of such key photographic elements as light, exposure, and composition will reward you with more good photos than the costliest camera ever will.

I have spent many wonderful days with a camera roaming the woods and fields of our family property in Monroe County. My passion for photography has grown as I have become aware that it is more than just a recreational pastime. When searching for something to photograph, I find myself moving slower and observing more. I see things I never noticed. The camera has become more than an instrument for capturing images. It is a tool that is expanding my knowledge and appreciation of the natural world.

I hope you come to the same realization with your photography. 📷

*Editor’s Note: Jim Hybart is a freelance photographer and owner of Hybart Woodland Services, a property maintenance company in Monroe County. If you have questions or comments about photography or would like to share some of your photographic experiences, write him at: J. W. Hybart, III  
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